



Painted by Bel Air artist Lori Deibert, this mural is dedicated to the Soldiers of Company C of the 1088th Engineering Battalion, Louisiana Army National Guard, in thanks for their service in Iraq. The mural was presented to the Soldiers during an awards ceremony Jan. 22 at the National Guard Armory in Napoleonville, La.

## Local artist's mural depicts life in Iraq to honor Soldiers



Soldiers from the 1088th Engineering Battalion unveil the mural dedicated to their service in Iraq.

**Story and photos by  
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APG News**

Members of Company C of the 1088th Engineering Battalion, Louisiana National Guard were surprised and pleased to be presented with a mural painted by Bel Air artist, Lori Deibert, at an awards ceremony at the New Orleans National Guard Armory in Napoleonville, La., Jan. 21.

The Soldiers recently reconvened as a group, after returning to Louisiana a week after Hurricane Katrina rav-

aged the area. Some went to other states to find loved ones, some went to the damaged areas looking for their homes, while others, whose hometowns were unaffected by Katrina, stayed on active duty and aided in the relief effort.

Presented with numerous awards, each Soldier received a display flag, several coins and pins, ribbons and medals. Several dozen Soldiers earned personal awards, ranging from the Purple Heart to the Meritorious Service Medal.

Speaking to the unit, retired

Col. John R. Douglas, the group's first commander, said, "I just can't tell you how good it feels to see you guys succeed. Thank you for doing your part to keep our country free. We as a nation need to tell you how thankful we are for your families' sacrifices."

Brig. Gen. Hugh Downer, former Speaker of the Louisiana House of Representatives, also addressed the troops. He spoke of their dedication and commitment to their fellow man, as they returned from Iraq and went to

work on the hurricane affected lands.

"These troops came home to a friendly land, but another war—a war on Mother Nature that they could not win, but just mitigate the casualties," he said.

Downer also spoke about the mural, saying that it does an excellent job of covering the "proud history and heritage of this fine unit."

"We shall never forget [the War in Iraq], but this mural will help us remind those in the future what it is all about," he said while speaking of the times to come.

The mural itself came about in an unusual way.

Deibert has a Web site, [www.muraldesigns.com](http://www.muraldesigns.com), which was located by Vincent Fabro, civilian volunteer with the New Orleans Army National Guard Armory. Fabro got Deibert's phone number and called her up about a year ago.

"I thought it was a prank call," she laughed.

Fabro called to ask for advice, telling Deibert that he and retired Sgt. 1st Class Farrell Gros were determined to create a mural for the Soldiers in Iraq to be presented upon their return.

He planned to have prisoners from the jail next door come over and paint the mural. He wanted it to depict a Soldier climbing from a tank, but, not just a Soldier, a half man, half dog Soldier, a red dog. A big red bull dog is the company's mascot.

"The first thing I thought of was 'Clifford, The Big Red Dog,'" Deibert said.

But, the more Fabro spoke of the dedication of these troops and their impending return from Iraq, Deibert began to realize that this was an honest inquiry.

Deibert convinced Fabro that it would be better to have an artist create the mural, and that the red dog should be incorporated in a different way.

Fabro was not the only one with incomplete ideas, however. Deibert thought that a good mural would be of a Soldier hugging an Iraqi child.

"I was completely unfamiliar with the military experience," she said. "After researching thousands and thousands of images, I began to slowly absorb the reality of Iraq."

The image of the Soldier and child was not a bad idea, but the wrong way to depict a Soldier's duties during the war.

"It would have been an incomplete representation," Deibert added.

Deibert ended up taking a number of images and incorporating them into the piece. Soldiers in full battle gear

kicking down a door; an Iraqi waving a flag; a memorial with a helmet, boots and rifle; a Soldier holding the hand of an Iraqi child walking down the road; an American flag and a map of Iraq constitute the majority of the painting. More subtly located inside the letters are images like the Soldier hugging an Iraqi child, an eagle and the barren Iraq landscape.

A list of fallen Soldiers is in the corner of the mural and in the background is a letter home, written by Lt. Will Saint, a Soldier from Baton Rouge.

Deibert painted the mural in a week and a half in April of 2005. She lived at the armory on a cot, cooking meals in the armory's industrial kitchen and using the men's room to shower, as the ladies room had no hot water.

The mural was to be presented to the Soldiers after they returned from Iraq, but the ceremony was delayed because of the wrath of Mother Nature and the aftermath.

Since her original painting of the mural, another Soldier was killed in action, whose name was added upon Deibert's return for the ceremony.

The mural was well received, and plenty of family members and guardsmen stood by to study it after the presentation.

And, the work itself created a new appreciation for the work of the military in Deibert.

"It was really interesting for a civilian person to go through this journey," she said. "The whole idea of it is interesting. To have a living memorial to what the Soldiers did, and not just a cake and punch reception, is fantastic."



Company Commander Capt. Henry C. Capello shows his daughter, Sabrina, the awards he received for his service in Iraq, as she is held by her mother, Capt. Cristina Capello, Headquarters Unit, Louisiana Army National Guard.

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